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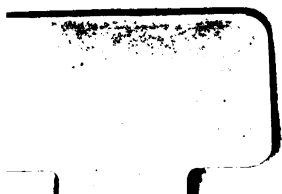


# THE BACKWARD SWING

AND OTHER STORIES

BY A. L. O. E.













THE PARTY IN HAYLANDS MEADOWS.

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# THE BACKWARD SWING.

And Other Stories.

By

A. L. O. E.,

Author of "*Fairy Frisket*," "*Fairy Know-a-bit*,"  
"*The Giant-Killer*," &c., &c.

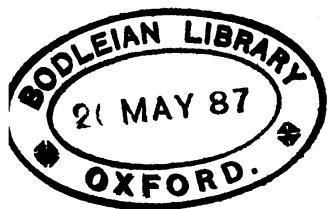


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## The Backward Swing.

---

HAT! can my darling say that she is not happy, when I thought that I had left her nothing to wish for?" was the gentle reproof of Lady Millicent Brooks, as she fondly stroked the long hair of her spoilt little girl.

"No ; I'm not happy at all," muttered Milly, pettishly, drawing back her head from the gentle caress of her mother.

"Why, you told me, my child, that if I would allow you to join the picnic party in Haylands Meadows, you would

be happy as a queen. Is not your friend Nora May to be there?"

"Yes; she's to be there," replied Milly Brooks, looking more out of humour than before; "and that's just the thing that vexes me. Nora is to wear her new jacket of sky-blue silk over a flounced scarlet skirt, and I have nothing to put on but the gray dress which I stained with the currants on Sunday. I'd rather not go to the picnic at all, than go in that horrid old gray!"

Had Lady Milicent been a sensible mother, she would have tried to laugh her silly little girl out of the folly of thinking that happiness could possibly depend on the colour or fashion of a dress. She might have reminded Milly of the verse which shows how absurd it is to be vain of what we share with insects and flowers.

“The tulip and the butterfly  
Appear in gayer coats than I;  
Let me be dressed fine as I will,  
Flowers, birds, and worms excel me still.”

But Lady Milicent was not a wise mother, nor a sensible woman. She was indeed fond of her only child, and used often to say that her greatest wish upon earth was to make Milly perfectly happy. Whether the lady went the right way to obtain this wish, by indulging a selfish girl in every idle whim, may be seen in my little story.

“And so my pet has set her heart on a sky-blue jacket and a flounced scarlet skirt,” said Lady Milicent Brooks. “Mamma can deny her darling nothing. Come and kiss me, sweet love, and I’ll promise that you shall go to the picnic party dressed in any way that you fancy. Will my Milly be happy then?”

Milly was sure that she must be happy, and kissed her indulgent mother, but

quite forgot to thank her. It is to be feared that it is a common thing for spoilt children to be ungrateful.

The day for the picnic arrived. Decked out in all her gaudy finery, Milly came to bid her mother good-bye.

“Now, is my darling not happy?” asked Lady Milicent Brooks. But Milly’s face did not smile in return for the smile of her parent.

“My new boots pinch me, and the cuffs of this stupid jacket are so hot and tight, and the collar is ever so much too big!” cried the discontented child, hitching her shoulders, and pouting her lips as if she felt quite ill-used.

Lady Milicent Brooks sighed gently ; her fond heart was disappointed. She had done all that she could to please a girl who would not be pleased. “She will be happy when she is once amongst her merry young companions,” thought

the lady, as her daughter drove off in the carriage from her door.

And it seemed for a time—a very short time—as if Milly were happy indeed, as, with Nora and Lola and Harry May, she gambolled over the meadows, gay with buttercups, daisies, and clover. But it is as impossible to be long happy with an envious, selfish, discontented heart, as to be comfortable with a sharp nail galling one's foot. The nail hurts just as much under a silken stocking as under one of coarse wool. Nora had a new crimson skipping-rope, and this was enough to make her silly companion envious and dull.

“I wish I had such a skipping-rope,” sighed Milly; “I'd show you how I can skip forwards or backwards, or cross the rope over my head. It is provoking that nurse never reminded me to bring my skipping-rope with me; but it is an



ugly blue thing, not half so pretty as yours."

"I'll lend you mine," said Nora, who was one of the best-tempered girls in the world.

Milly skipped and laughed, and for a few minutes really enjoyed the sport. Harry, quietly seated on the grass, watched her as the rope went round and round, while her long hair fluttered in the wind, and her scarlet flounces danced up and down as she jumped.

"I wonder how long Milly's pleasure will last?" thought the boy. "Her spirits seem to me just like the girl swinging yonder under the tree. Give them a push and up they go, as if they would mount into the clouds; but there always comes *the backward swing*, and she who is laughing one moment is ready to cry at the next."

Milly's "backward swing" came soon.

enough. "This tires me so!" she cried, flinging the skipping-rope away, and throwing herself on the grass. "I wish the day were not so hot; there's not a bit of shade in this meadow!"

Nora had gathered a quantity of wild-flowers; with them she had made a beautiful wreath, which she had placed on the head of her sister Lola.

"I want to have a wreath like that!" cried the discontented Milly Brooks.

"There are some of my flowers left in Lola's hat," said Nora. "Harry, there's a dear boy, twine a wreath for Milly; we wish her to be as happy as we are."

"I don't believe that all the flowers in the world would do that," thought Harry; but, to please his kind little sister, he set about making the wreath. Harry was not long in finishing his work, and the flowers looked so pretty, that they won a smile even from Milly.

But soon came "the backward swing." Scarcely had the wreath been placed on her brow, when the girl started up with a scream.

"There!—see!—see!—there's a horrid, *horrid* little spider dropped out on my dress! I'm sure the flowers are swarming with insects. Look!—look!—isn't there something running over my neck?" and Milly dashed her wreath to the ground.

"All Milly's wreaths have spiders in them," thought Harry; "a discontented mind like hers will manage to spin its web among the loveliest flowers!"

The spider was taken away, no other insect could be discovered, but Milly's pleasure in her wreath had quite gone away. She complained that she was thirsty and tired, and did her best by her murmurs to destroy the enjoyment felt by the rest of the party.

But now the time had come to prepare the picnic meal. A fire was lighted in a heap of dry sticks piled at the edge of the path. A kettle was suspended over the fire ; fruit and cakes were handed round, and for a time all appeared merry and gay.

“ Let’s have a song while the kettle is boiling,” said Nora.

“ Let’s have a song !” cried the rest of the party.

“ Harry, you are our piping bullfinch,” said Lola ; “ give us something that’s merry and funny.”

Harry did not wait to be asked twice ; he sang a lively little song, which perhaps may not be new to some of my readers :—

#### SONG.

How sulky Eliza appears,  
Her face is as dark as a fog !  
She has tumbled down o’er head and ears  
Right into the Ill-temper Bog !

## THE BACKWARD SWING.

## CHORUS.

'Tis a horrible place that bog!  
I never could bear to be in it;  
And if I were you  
I would struggle right through,  
And be out of the mud in a minute!

On Good-temper Hill if we keep,  
What sunshiny smiles will be ours!  
If it sometimes be rugged and steep,  
It is spangled all over with flowers.

## CHORUS.

But oh! that sad Ill-temper Bog,  
I never could bear to be in it;  
And if I were you  
I would struggle right through,  
And be out of the mud in a minute!

As brambles entangle the feet,  
Little troubles our comforts may clog;  
But sure the first thorn that we meet  
Need not make us jump into the bog!

## CHORUS.

'Tis a terrible place that bog!  
I never could bear to be in it;  
And if I were you  
I would struggle right through,  
And be out of the mud in a minute!

Before the last notes of the chorus

were over, the kettle was singing its own merry tune, while the white steam rose out of its spout.

“Now for a good cup of tea,” said one of the elder ladies, as she lifted the boiling kettle from the fire.

“Here is the tea to put into the pot, and here is the sugar to sweeten it,” cried Harry; “and here—no, where is the milk?” he added, looking round him to find it.

“Dear! dear! we’ve quite forgotten the milk!” exclaimed Nora. “But never mind that, we shall do very well without it.”

“You may, but I can’t!” cried Milly, looking disappointed and sulky. “How stupid it was to leave it behind! I never can drink my tea without having plenty of milk.”

“There’s ‘the backward swing’!” thought Harry.

“Let’s go to yon cottage at the side of the lane,” suggested Nora, “and try if we cannot get there a drop of milk for Milly.”

Off scampered Harry and his sister, and Milly, who was rather curious to see the inside of a cottage, was not long behind them. She came up with Harry and Nora just as their tap at the cottage door was answered by its being opened by a girl from within.

The scene was a novel one to Milly. Half-a-dozen children of various sizes, but all with shaggy hair, sunburnt faces, and clothes patched and worn, were seated at a deal table eating their noon-day meal. It was a very different dinner from that to which Milly Brooks was accustomed to sit down every day, too often with peevish looks and a discontented spirit. The cottagers had a lump of bread on the table, and in a wooden

bowl a mess of plain boiled rice. There was not a scrap of fish, flesh, or fowl to be seen in the place, and yet the little family looked quite contented and happy.

“Pray, could you kindly let us have a little milk?” said Nora May, speaking as politely to the poor girl as if she had been addressing a lady.

“Please, miss, we’ve never a drop,” replied the cottager, looking with surprise at the gaily-dressed visitors who stood at her door.

“It’s no great hardship for us to go without milk in our tea for once in a way,” remarked Harry, as he and his companions turned from the door. “I suspect that these poor children want a good many things which they never can get, and yet what merry grins were on their rough little faces.”

“Harry, such a famous thought has struck me!” cried Nora, her eyes spark-



ling with glee. "We've brought for our picnic more good things than we can possibly eat. We'll ask if we may not carry off some to that cottage. Would it not be a treat to the ragged children to have pies and cakes with their bread, and fruit to eat with their bowl of boiled rice!"

"It would be jolly good fun for them," cried Harry, "and almost as much for us."

Nora's kind plan was soon carried out. She and Harry returned to the cottage laden with good things, which made the poor hungry children open their eyes wide, and their mouths too, as soon as the pies, the cakes, and the fruit had been set before them. Milly, in her sky-blue jacket and scarlet skirt, stood at the door watching their eager, joyful faces, and when she glanced at Nora and Harry she saw all the cottagers' pleasure reflected on theirs.

“How easily some people are made happy,” thought the poor spoilt little lady, as slowly she sauntered back to the party gathered near the fire, who were laughing and chatting over their milkless tea. Milly almost envied the little cottagers their power of enjoying ; *they* had the sauce of hunger, *they* had the milk of content.

Harry and Nora followed, jumping and skipping over the grass, all the more able to relish their feast and their fun because they had cared for others, and let the poor have a share.

About an hour afterwards the picnic party broke up. Milly bade good-bye to her companions, and in her mother’s fine carriage drove quickly back to her home.

“Have you been happy, very happy, my darling ?” asked Lady Milicent Brooks, as she welcomed her daughter back.

Milly gave no reply ; she was tired and disappointed, and cared not to give an account of the day which had brought to her so little of the pleasure which she had expected.


I hope that none of my readers are like poor, spoilt Milly Brooks, or they will find, like her, that let the peevish and discontented be sent up ever so high on the airy way of pleasure, there always comes "the backward swing ;" and the worst part of the matter is that that backward swing is pretty sure to land them, as it did poor Milly, right in the ILL-TEMPER BOG !





## How it Burns!

---

“**T**AME DEXTER is the cleverest woman in my parish!” The vicar had said that once, and the saying had many times been repeated; for who could deny that the village schoolmistress had a brain and a hand and an eye such as could scarcely be matched in the county! It was not merely that the brain was so well stuffed with book-learning that

“Still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all she knew;”

or that the hand could get through more

work in a day than other women's hands in a week ; or that the eye was quick to find out a trick in a pupil even at the furthest end of the school-room ;—Dame Dexter was clever in other ways besides these. She was at the very least as much consulted in cases of illness as Dr. Jollup, though she did not, like him, wear spectacles, sport a gold-headed cane, or have a great brass plate on her door. How well her pupils knew where to go for advice if they had ear-ache, or head-ache, or an ache in any other place ! How well they knew the look of Dame Dexter's little press, with its rows of bottles, all neatly labelled like those in the chemist's shop ! It was almost a pleasure to be sick, with Dame Dexter for doctor and nurse ; she made her medicines so nice, that no one could mind trying her cures.

At least so thought little Mary May,

after she had been relieved of her cough by Dame Dexter's famous syrup. The cough had been so severe, that poor Mary had feared that it would keep her from the school treat to be given at the Hall — the German tree upon New Year's Day. She had gone to Dame Dexter for advice, as every sick child in the village was sure to go. How nice looked the thick, rich syrup which the dame poured out of one of her bottles ; how good it tasted ; and oh, how it eased the cough ! Mary was so well on the last day of the year, that she scarcely coughed at all, and the dame thought it quite needless to give her another drop of the syrup. Mary was glad to lose her cough, but sorry to lose the sweet physic ; she thought it as nice as anything in a confectioner's shop.

Neat new dresses had been given to each of the girls at the school on that

day for them to wear on the following morning. Mary was delighted with her purple serge frock, for had she not made it herself, and did it not fit her exactly ? She was also greatly pleased with the pretty chintz bag given by the squire's lady to hold her work, her thimble, scissors, and thread. But perhaps Mary was most pleased of all with the thought of the treat on the morrow ; for a lighted German tree she had never seen before in her life.

Evening closed in early : at the end of December it is growing quite dark by four o'clock, at which time the school always broke up. The children dispersed to their homes, merry and gay, with the New Year's holiday before them. Dame Dexter went up to her own little room ; she had perhaps preparations to make for the morrow, or she had gone to pray for her pupils, that

a blessing might rest upon them through the year that so soon would begin. For the dame was one to pray as well as to work ; she had not only earthly wisdom, but that far more precious wisdom which comes from above.

Mary May, the last of the pupils to leave the school-room, was just going out into the clear frosty air, when she remembered that she had neglected to hang up her bag on its own nail on the wall. Dame Dexter liked everything to be done in order ; every bag had its nail, and every nail had its number. Though the room was now very dark, Mary easily found her bag, and went with it in her hand towards the row of nails which was just beyond Dame Dexter's locked-up press. As Mary passed the press, she struck against something which projected a little from the door. Dame Dexter had actually left her key



in the lock—a thing which the careful mistress had never been known to do before. That press, of which the children only now and then had a glimpse—that press, with its rows of curious bottles, could now be opened by Mary's merely turning the key !

It was a great temptation to Mary, for she remembered the sweet cough medicine ; and a longing came over her to taste again, if it were but a few drops, of the syrup. It was much the same temptation as that which came upon Eve, when she disobeyed God's command, and brought sin and sorrow into the world. It was a temptation which now often besets boys and girls, when the ripe fruit or the tempting plateful of cake lies in their way, and they try to think that the solemn command, "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL," was never meant to apply to things so small as these.

“ I will but peep inside,” thought Mary, as she turned the key and drew open the door of the press ; lingering close to the brink of sin, till temptation drew her over the edge. She first peeped ;—there was little to be seen, for the room was dark, and the press still darker, and she could scarcely distinguish one bottle from another.

“ I think that I know which one holds the syrup,” said Mary to herself, putting out her hand, and then stopping to listen, lest Dame Dexter should come down the stairs. “ It was always put back into this corner, and had a glass stopper just like this !” It was not by sight, but by feeling, that Mary knew that the bottle which she was touching had a glass stopper. “ There can be no harm in my tasting what is in it, just to make sure ;” and the little thief—for a thief we must call her—cautiously took

out the stopper, and put the phial to her mouth.

Scarcely had a drop touched her tongue when Mary started and almost screamed, jerked the bottle, dropped the stopper, and nearly let the phial itself fall out of her hand !

“ Oh, it burns !—it burns ! ” cried Mary, dancing about with pain, and pressing her hand to her mouth, which felt as if scalding oil had been put to her tongue.

But Mary dared not scream aloud, or make any great noise, so much she dreaded lest Dame Dexter should hear her. The child's thoughts were soon turned to the necessity of putting back the bottle, and locking the press, so that no one should find out what she had done.

“ I'm glad that I did not drop the bottle—this dreadful bottle,” said Mary

to herself, as the tears rolled down her cheeks from her pain. "I'm sure that I've spilt some of the stuff that was in it, the sudden burning made me give such a start. But oh, dear, dear! where can the stopper have run to? I wish that the room were not so dark; it makes it so hard to find a little thing on the floor."

Mary went down on her knees, and groped on the floor, till at last she found the stopper.

"I am rather afraid to touch that bottle again," thought Mary; "but I dare not leave it unstopped, for who can tell what that dreadful burning stuff might do if it were without a stopper! How it burns!—oh dear, how it burns!"

After replacing the stopper in the bottle, and the bottle in the press, Mary locked the press; and then, with trembling fingers, hung up her bag on the

second nail in the wall—she found the right one by feeling. Then homewards ran the poor child with her hand on her mouth ; the fluid which she had taken had burned the skin on the tip of her tongue.

“ What has kept you out so late, Mary ? ” inquired Mrs. May ; “ and why do you hold your hand to your mouth ? ”

“ I’ve a pain,” said Mary, half crying. She had answered the second question, but she dared not answer the first.

“ That comes of dawdling about in the cold,” said her mother. “ See, Joe and Patty have done their suppers ; make haste and take yours, my dear child.”

Mary May was hungry and cold ; but she could not enjoy her hot tea, nor her thick slice of white bread and butter, for her mouth was paining her so. Mrs. May soon sent her child up to bed, thinking that she had face-ache or tooth-

ache from being out after dark. The girl who had stolen from the press of her mistress, was not honest enough to own the truth to her mother.

No one can wonder that Mary on that night forgot her prayers. It was a sad way to close the year through which her heavenly Father had fed, clothed, and cared for the child ! There had been three hundred and sixty-five days in that year, and on every one of these days Mary had had two or three meals, not one of which she had earned ! While so many children had been hungry, she had had bread ; while so many had been sick, she had had health, till the cough had come which had so quickly been cured. It was sad, indeed, that Mary should go to rest on that last night in the year, forgetting to thank her Maker for blessings so great and so undeserved !

Mary lay long in her bed before she could get to sleep, and then she did not awake till late. She was roused by the sound of a cheerful hymn from Patty, who began the New Year as all should begin it, by praising and blessing the Lord. Mary was not able to sing ; she had not only no heart to do so, but her mouth, though much better, was still very sore. Mary, however, rose quickly and dressed, and tried to drown remembrance of her fault in thoughts of the pleasures before her—the feast at the squire's house, and the beautiful German tree.

The May family met for breakfast. Scarcely had Mary come into the room when her brother Joe cried out,—“ Why, Mary, what have you done with your frock ? ”

“ What have you done indeed ? ” exclaimed Mrs. May, starting up from her

seat. "Why, you've burned a hole in your nice new dress !"

"Not one hole—two—three—only look !" cried Joe, pointing at the warm stuff, over which some drops from the dame's phial had fallen.

"Your new dress—your beautiful dress ! Oh, I'm so sorry !" exclaimed Patty, really vexed at the misfortune which had befallen her sister.

"How on earth did you do it ?" cried the mother.

"You must have been playing with a red-hot poker !" said Joe.

"Something hot has been spilt on the dress," murmured Mary, looking down in dismay on the holes.

"Hot ! it must have been burning !" cried her mother, who was exceedingly annoyed, for she was too poor to buy warm dresses for her children. "You can't go to the Hall in rags ; and what



will the squire's lady say if she does not see you wearing her present ? ”

Mary May burst into tears.

Her mother had a tender heart, and did not like to see her girl begin the New Year by crying.

“ Accidents will happen,” she said ; “ though I can't think how this came about. But cheer up, my girl. You can't go to the Hall in a dress full of holes, but you can wear your old one, which is patched very neatly. Run upstairs, Mary, and put it on as fast as you can, or you will be late, I fear, for the meeting at school.”

Very sadly indeed Mary went upstairs, and exchanged her new warm purple dress for an old thin patched one of faded print. She would have given anything now that she had not thought of stealing the syrup.

Shivering and sad, Mary went off with

her sister and brother to the school, vexed by their trying, naturally enough, to guess how Mary could possibly have managed to burn three holes in her frock. She began the New Year by being out of temper, as well as out of spirits. One fault draws on another, just like the links in a chain.

“ Why, Mary, where’s your new dress ? ”

“ I say, you’re not going to the Hall in those patches ? ”

“ What is the matter with you, Mary, your eyes are so red ? ”

Such were the questions which the girl had to encounter from her school-fellows on entering the room from which, after prayers, all the young people were to march in glad procession to the Hall, where the German tree was prepared.

All this questioning was harder to bear than even the pain in Mary’s mouth,

and harder still was it to stand Dame Dexter's keen inquiring look ; but, perhaps, hardest of all was it to Mary to have to kneel while the mistress offered up the morning prayer and thanksgiving, which reminded the child that *sin* had been the cause of her sorrow.

After the prayers were ended, every school-girl ran to take down her bag from its nail, for each was to carry in it a piece of her own work as a New Year's gift to the squire's kind lady. Mary's piece of work was a sampler, which had cost her much time and trouble ; but she thought it the very prettiest sampler that had ever been made in the school.

As Mary was taking down her bag, to her surprise, without any apparent cause, out of it dropped her scissors and thimble !

" Why, one would say that you had a hole in your bag ! " cried one of the girls.

“ Sure enough, there is a hole ! ” said another, pointing to the corner of the new bag.

“ Oh ! that horrible, horrible burning stuff must have fallen on it too ! ” thought Mary, as she pulled open the bag, half afraid to look at the sampler within it.

“ O Mary, Mary ! what can have burned it ? Look at your pretty sampler ; only see—there’s a hole in the very middle of it ! ” cried several of the girls crowding around, some full of curiosity, some of pity, for the poor disappointed little worker.

Mary could bear her troubles no longer. She flung down sampler and bag on the school-room table, and burst out crying again.

“ Don’t crowd around her—leave her quiet ! ” said Dame Dexter gently, but firmly, waving back her pupils, who were thronging about Mary May. “ Form

into line, and march off to the Hall. Mary May is not going with you ; I will remain with her here for awhile."

The children formed into line; they had too much pleasure before them to be much cast down by the sight of Mary's sorrow, though they wished much to know who had burned a hole in her sampler and bag. Only Patty lingered behind, anxious to comfort her sister, till Dame Dexter bade her follow her companions, who, laughing and chatting, were on their way to the Hall.

As soon as the mistress and her pupil were alone together, the dame laid her hand on the shoulder of Mary, and, looking her full in the face, said gravely, "It was you, then, who took the vitriol yesterday evening out of my press. What led you to do such a thing, Mary May?"

"I did not mean—that is—I thought

—I took it for the syrup,” stammered forth Mary.

“ Ah ! my child,” said Dame Dexter, sadly, “ you are not the first one to expect to find sin as sweet as syrup, and to find it at last like a burning flame ! You thought that you could steal a little of the syrup without the theft being found out ; but though not always, perhaps, in this world, most surely in the next will the Lord’s words be fulfilled,—‘ *There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed ; and hid, that shall not be known*’ (Matt. x. 26). If you could hide a sin in darkness from every fellow-creature, you could not hide it from God, and he will make secret things to be open as day in the sight of angels and men.”

Mary trembled at the thought.

“ Oh ! may what has happened to you, Mary,” her mistress went on, “ engrave

deeply in your mind the warning in Scripture against possessing ill-gotten gain. That warning is specially addressed, indeed, to the rich, but is also suited to guard the poor from daring to take anything that is not lawfully their own : ‘ *Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire* ’ ” (James v. 3).

Poor Mary’s mouth, still blistered and sore, made her feel the words from the Bible more startling.

“ Yes,” continued the dame, “ everything gotten through sin—whether it be the stolen purse or the stolen pear, the profits earned by the wilful Sabbath-breaker, or any other person disobeying conscience for the sake of gain—will be as the vitriol to the soul !—it may be said of it, *How it burns!* it will destroy all peace with God, and unless the sin be repented

of and forgiven, will shut out from heaven as surely as Eve's taking and eating forbidden fruit shut her out from the garden of Eden."

"I am sorry—I am very sorry for what I have done," sobbed Mary.

"Tell your heavenly Father that you are so, my child; kneel down and ask him, for the sake of His Son, to forgive this and every other fault you have ever committed. There are many sins that trouble the conscience but little, because we do not see the punishment following closely behind. Had you found the syrup instead of the vitriol, perhaps you would have felt no penitence, shed no tears, and have soon forgotten the whole matter, as if it had been a very small thing to steal a few drops from a bottle. You may therefore be thankful, dear Mary, that you made the mistake which has caused you disappointment and



shame ; for it has prevented your ever being likely to forget your fault, and I trust and pray that it may help to prevent your ever repeating it."

So Mary knelt down in the school-room, and with clasped hands and tearful eyes asked to be forgiven for having tried to take what was not her own. Mary rose from her knees humbled and sad, yet still with a lightened heart, and received a kind kiss from Dame Dexter.

Though Mary had lost the treat of the German tree—though holes had been burned in her dress and her bag—though her pretty sampler had been spoiled, and her mouth gave her pain for several days—yet the lesson which she had learned was worth all the distress which it had cost her ; for from that New Year's Day Mary never again attempted to steal so much as a pea. She could have been trusted unwatched and alone

in a room full of sweetmeats and fruit ; for if tempted for a moment to take what was not her own, Mary always turned away as the thought recurred to her mind—"A stolen thing may seem sweet as syrup at first ; but at last how it burns !—*how it burns !*"





## I Can't Get Rid of It.

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**H**OW hot it is, and how tired I am!" exclaimed Katie Storrs, as she flung herself down on the stubble in a corn-field in which she and her sister Milly had been gleaning.

"It is hot, and no doubt you are tired," observed Milly calmly; "but I don't see why you cannot say so without wrinkling your brow into as many furrows as the plough made in this field."

"You know that I've a trick of frowning," replied Katie, who, though not an

ill-tempered girl, had acquired an ugly habit, which often made her look as if she were so.

“Yes; and I know that mother says that as long as you have that trick there is not a chance of your getting a place as a nursery-maid: for a mother would as soon trust a baby to a bear as to a girl who looks as if she would eat it.”

Katie laughed, and as she laughed all the ugly creases disappeared from her brow. “I know that frowning is a bad habit,” she said; “but I can’t get rid of it, for it sticks to me like a bur.”

“Don’t you think that you could get rid of it if you only tried hard enough?” asked Milly.

Katie was not at all inclined to try hard. As she could not see her own frowns, she did not care to take any trouble about them.

“I will try to help you to leave off

frowning," said Milly, "by telling you whenever I see the ugly little furrows beginning to rise."

"I don't want you to help me—I don't like your fault-finding!" cried Katie, a little pettishly. Frowning rather more than usual, the girl rose from her seat on the ground, picked up the straw bonnet which she had thrown off to cool her heated head, raised her bundle of gleanings, and set out on her homeward way.

Milly followed her sister at a little distance, and soon overtook her; for Katie had not walked many yards before her stuff dress had been caught by a long straggling spray of bramble which had chanced to lie on her path.

"Why, what a bush you have dangling behind you, Katie!" cried Milly.

"Yes; tiresome thing!" exclaimed the young gleaner, trying to shake it off by

a vigorous kick. But the bramble had too firm a hold on the dress to be thus easily knocked aside.

"It's nearly five feet long!" laughed Milly. "You can't think how funny you look with it trailing on the ground, and catching up all the dust and loose straws as you walk."

"I wish that instead of laughing you would come and help me to get rid of it," cried Katie, who was now stamping, twisting, and frowning with all her might. But stamping, twisting, and frowning did not free the little prisoner from the close-clinging bramble that had hooked itself into her dress.

"You did not wish me to help you to get rid of something that sticks to you as that brier does," observed Milly. "A bad habit is just like a bramble; and neither the one nor the other can be got rid of by a mere wish. Patience and

perseverance will do the work at last." And smiling as she passed her young sister, Milly went on to her home, leaving poor Katie to struggle with her long bramble as best she might.

It seemed scarcely kind in Milly to act thus; but she wished to give her sister a lesson, that it is no reason that because a bad habit sticks to us "like a bur," we should not make a firm persevering effort to overcome it.

"I never knew such a horrid brier!" exclaimed Katie Storrs, when all her turning, and trampling, and pulling had but seemed to fix the bramble more firmly in her stuff frock. "I'll just walk on and not mind it; perhaps it may drop off of its own accord."

Katie walked on, but soon found that the bramble would *not* drop off of its own accord, and that it was quite impossible not to mind it. She therefore stopped

short again, and after a good deal more of shaking and kicking, all to no purpose, she set steadily to the task of releasing her dress, by drawing from it, one by one, each of the little thorns that were deeply hooked into the stuff.

“It’s tiresome work this, and painful work too,” muttered Katie, as she pricked her little brown finger with a thorn, and made it bleed. “But the work *can* and *must* be done. I can’t go right through the village with a great bramble five feet long trailing on the ground behind me.”

Need I tell my young readers that Katie Storrs *did* free herself at last, and that she had the pleasure of flinging the great brier branch over the hedge, where it never again could catch a passenger’s dress? Then as Katie, released from her troublesome follower, went on her way, she thought of the words of her sister: “A bad habit is just like a bramble;



and neither the one nor the other can be got rid of by a mere wish."

"Perhaps," thought the little girl, "if I were to try as hard to get rid of my trick of frowning as I did to pull thorns out of my skirt, I might in time succeed as well with the one thing as I did with the other. But I have never yet said about freeing myself from the bad habit what I said about freeing myself from the bramble,—‘It *can* and it *must* be done.’"

Let us hope that Katie not only thought wisely, but acted wisely also, and that her brow soon became as smooth as glass. I wish that each of my young readers would take the lesson home to herself. Of each I would ask, What is *your* tiresome bramble—what is your clinging bad habit? Is there nothing which you are apt to do which has often vexed your mother? Is there no idle trick

which you have often been told to leave off? Perhaps you have *wished* to get rid of some ugly habit ; but habits, like brambles, cling hard, and will not be cast off with a wish. Do not mind trouble, do not mind pain ; show patience and perseverance. Was it not better for Katie to walk through the village with a little prick on her finger, than trailing wherever she went a long bramble-branch on the ground behind her ?





## The Lost Sheep.

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“**W**ELL, a glowing hearth, a hot bowl of barley-broth, and a hearty welcome to top them, are no bad things on an evening like this!” exclaimed Charley Archer. He was a young English tourist, who, having been overtaken by a snow-storm on a Scotch mountain, was glad to find shelter and rest in the cottage of a shepherd.

“Ay, sir, the snaw fa’s fast, and it’s better to be inside four walls than outside them,” observed Madge, the shep-

herd's wife, as she set down upon the rough deal table a large steaming bowl, from which came a very savoury scent, inviting to the five or six merry-eyed bare-footed children that clustered around, and scarcely less so to the hungry traveller, who had had nothing to eat since an early breakfast, and whose twenty miles' walk over the hills had sharpened his appetite for his meal. "Ye maun bide here the nicht, sir,"\* she added; "though it be little we can offer, at least it's gi'en wi' gude will." And with true Scotch hospitality, Madge filled the bicker of her guest before she supplied those of her children, or that of the gudeman, as she called her husband.

The traveller was going at once to plunge his big pewter spoon into the savoury mess before him, but he noticed that none of the hungry little children

\* "You must stop here to-night, sir."

yet touched theirs. Ralph, the shepherd, lifted his blue bonnet from his head, and first reverently asked a blessing on the meal, and then the little ones eagerly began their supper.

“So there is simple faith to be found in this wild glen,” thought the English traveller.

“Where’s Jock?” asked Ralph, abruptly.

“He’s been seein’ to the sheep,” answered Madge; “but he ought to have been hame lang ere this. I hope there’s naething gane wrang wi’ the laddie;” and she glanced anxiously towards the closed door.

“Here he comes to answer for himself,” said Ralph, as the door suddenly opened, and a rough-headed lad of about ten years of age hastily entered the cottage, with his coarse garments half covered with snow. Hurried as was his

entrance, the boy stopped suddenly and stared in surprise for a moment at the stranger, for never before had Southern gentleman been seen in the lonely cottage.

“Why ha’ ye tarried sae lang, lad? Is a’ richt wi’ the sheep?” asked the father.

“There’s ane (one) missing, feyther; she’s wandered awa’, and I canna find her, and I’m afeard she’ll be lost under the drifting snaw!” The lad looked anxiously at his father, who had put down the untasted morsel which he had just been raising to his lips. “And what’s waur (worse) than a’,” continued Jock, “it’s God’s sheep as is missing!”

Exclamations of regret burst from all the children. It was evident that the creature called by so singular a title was an especial favourite with them all.

Ralph the shepherd rose from his

three-legged stool. "I'll gang (go) and seek her," he said; "I'd rather lose ony twa (two) ithers than her!"

"Ye'll bide and tak' a sup first, gude-man, just to keep out the cauld" (cold), said the wife, as her husband caught up his staff and prepared to go forth into the storm.

"Na, na; I'll nae leave the puir sheep to wander, while I sit in my ain warm ingle-nook," said the hardy Scot; and without another word he quitted the cottage.

"To think o' *that* sheep being lost!" sighed Jock, as with a rueful countenance, he took his place at the table. The boy was hungry and tired, but he seemed to be too anxious about the lost favourite to care for his supper.

"But she'll nae be lost; God's sheep winna be lost!" lisped Ailsie, the youngest child, whom the English stranger

had just succeeded in coaxing to sit on his knee.

“Why do you call her ‘God’s sheep’?” inquired Charley Archer, with some curiosity.

“Dinna ye ken (do not you know) she was Jeannie’s lamb?” answered Ailsie, in a subdued voice, fixing her eyes on those of the stranger with a solemn expression, which seemed strange on that round chubby face.

“Is Jeannie one of the party here?” asked Archer, glancing round the well-filled table.

“Na, she’s no here,” replied the child, gravely.

“Where is she, then, little one?”

A chubby finger pointed upwards, and Archer caught the sound of the mother’s sigh. He was vexed with himself for having asked after a member of the family who was no longer upon earth,



and to break the uncomfortable silence which followed, he said, "But you have not told me yet why you call the lost sheep 'God's sheep.'"

A smile came to the grave little face of Ailsie. "Dinna ye ken that Jeannie had ane lamb—an little pet lamb—that she fed and loved; and sae—" The child felt difficulty in telling her story, and looked to her mother to finish it for her.

"The gentleman winna care to hear about sic (such) matters, bairn," observed Madge, who did not wish to keep up the subject. But Archer looked as if he did care.

"It's only that when puir Jeannie was buried," said the eldest of the girls, "feyther and mither and a' of us agreed that we'd gie her pet lamb to God, and keep it for Him; and when it was a sheep and had lambs o' its ain, the siller (silver)

they brought should gae to the missions for sendin' the gospel abroad. Jeannie loved the missions when she was here, and helped them a bit wi' her wark (work), and we thought as how she'd like to help them still after she was gane to glory."

"And she *has* helped them a great bit," cried Ailsie triumphantly; "for the sheep had twa lambs in the spring, and feyther sold them, and there was a braw (fine) bit of gold in the plate at the kirk" (church).

"Gold!" murmured Archer to himself, as he looked round the bare walls of the dwelling, the simple fare on the table, the number of barefooted children, so many mouths to be fed! "So there is not only simple *faith* here," thought the stranger, "but that which must follow it—*good works*—a free liberality, which might put to the blush many of

the wealthy in the world. One lamb from the house has been taken, and so, in memory of her, one lamb from the flock has been devoted to the cause of spreading the knowledge of God."

"To think of *that* sheep being lost!" repeated Jock, sadly.

"Dinna be afeard, God winna let his ain (own) sheep be lost," said little Ailsie, with simple, unquestioning faith. She looked up again into Archer's face, and added, "Ye ken God *canna* let His ain sheep be lost."

"Nothing can ever be really *lost* that is given to God," said the traveller earnestly: "neither the gold, nor the faith that offers the gold; neither the wandering sheep upon earth, nor the folded lamb in heaven!"

Time passed, twilight came on, the short wintry day soon was ended. The fire blazed brightly in the cottage, and

Charley Archer told stories to the family who gathered around it. But the fate of the missing sheep was still in the minds of all—every now and then an anxious hope was expressed that “feyther” had found her; that she “hadna fallen into the burn” (stream), or “over the ledge,” but that “puir Jeannie’s pet” might yet “gie ither lambs to help the missions.”

Presently there was the sound of a distant shout! All the children started to their feet, though Archer had been in the very midst of a tale of adventure.

“She’s found! she’s found!” they cried, “and feyther’s bringing her hame!”

The children ran to the door, careless of snow or cold blast, to welcome their parent, bringing back the wandering sheep. Ailsie alone remained in the cottage, seated on the knee of her Eng-

lish friend. She was less excited by joy than the others, for she had been less troubled by fear. A bright, happy smile dimpled the little one's cheek, as she said to Archer, "I was no afeard; I kent vera weel the Lord wad tak' care o' His ain." \*

\* "I was not afraid; I knew very well the Lord would take care of His own."











